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ACTION

April 10, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Dean Moor

THROUGH: Richard Snelder

SUBJECT: Attached Report on Vietnam

Frank Shakespeare has sent you a copy of a report on Vietnam by Everett Bumgardner, long recognized as one of the foremost civilian experts on the war. Ev is now serving with Bill Colby in South Vietnam.

Ev's report was previously summarized for your use when it first came to our attention in February. Tab B contains a copy of the report and the summary.

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RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the reply to Shakespeare (Tab A).

85

April 15, 1969

**MEMORANDUM FOR MR. FRANK SHAKESPEARE
USIA**

Thank you for sending along Ev Bumgardner's report on Vietnam. His insights into Vietnamese attitudes toward U. S. policy are useful and I have passed the report along to the requisite specialists on my staff.

Henry A. Kissinger

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1 - HAK Chron
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WH/DM (4/10/69)

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DIRECTOR

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY
WASHINGTON

April 3, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Henry A. Kissinger
The White House

In going through our files, I came across
this recent perceptive report by one of our most
experienced observers on public attitudes in
Viet-Nam.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Frank Shakespeare

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H.K.

January 6, 1969

THRU :

IAF - Dan Oloksiw
IAF - Dave Sheppard

IAF - Everet Bumgardner

CURRENT POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE VIETNAMESE BODY POLITIC

During a three-week visit in Viet-Nam during December, I was able to speak privately with more than forty Vietnamese friends. They included political organizers and leaders, elder statesmen, religious leaders, successful military leaders, and pacification planners and executors. The reactions to the discussions I had are synthesized to represent views of the overwhelming majority of these friends.

A. Vietnamese Understand American Social Problems Bearing on Viet-Nam Policy

A marked change has occurred since last May when I discussed the same topics as I did during this trip. Previously the thought of a change in American policy of "Allies Forever" was such a painful one that they generally reacted by an out-pouring of anti-communist reasons why we should take no notice of discontent at home over the progress of the war. Now, a realistic understanding of our problems and the reaction it has had upon Viet-Nam policy is apparent. Most individuals, by following the U.S. elections, listening to returning Viet-Nam legislators, and personal contact with the American community over a long period of time, understand that there have been and will be changes in U.S. Viet-Nam policy. Most of them accept this as an irreversible trend and therefore look forward and not backward for solutions to Viet-Nam's future. This marked change was perhaps one of the two most noticeable changes observed among friends and acquaintances during the entire trip.

These Vietnamese realistically accept and apparently expect an American troop withdrawal in the near future. Their words of advice, however, add up to one of a plea for advance notice of the time and size of the withdrawal. Maximum political consideration should be given to the withdrawal announcement. A joint statement, sufficiently in advance of the actual event, is a must. Properly announced, the effect upon Vietnamese morale will be no more than minimal. On the reverse, should the announcement be timed to a sudden withdrawal of a large number of U.S. troops, the effect could panic not only the intellectual and political community but also the Vietnamese business community.

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If U.S. policy calls for a reduced U.S. troop commitment in Viet-Nam during this coming year, properly handled and exploited psychologically, the Vietnamese political and intellectual leaders do not see it as a disaster. They generally accept the fact that if this is achieved slowly and jointly, ARVN troops will be able to assume the burden without a loss of confidence on the part of the population. A small majority of those to whom I talked even suggested that an immediate (April or May) withdrawal of 50,000 support troops would have a beneficial effect not only on the American public but on the dissident elements of the political community who still take refuge in the thought that the incoming administration might have a different policy from the outgoing administration.

B. Vietnamese Politicians' Views of Power-Sharing with Liberation Front Members

The second most interesting observation pertaining to the about-face that most of the Vietnamese have made since last May is on the subject of the composition of the NLF. Last May perhaps only two of my closest friends would admit to me they honestly believe there are still many nationalists ("Non-card-carrying Communist tools of Hanoi") in the NLF. Now, with but one exception, all of them, when pressed on this question, say that the NLF does indeed have a sizable portion of people who are nationalists. Further, if these individuals are given a place in the power structure at the politically right moment, many of them would break away from domination by the CADRE and communist members of the front. Some of them recounted to me what happened in 1949 as an example. When the Bao Dai government was formed as an alternative to Ho Chi Minh, many non-communist Viet-Minh left the Viet-Minh and came back to the national government. This was not a positive vote for Bao Dai but a negative vote for the Viet-Minh. The majority of my friends believe that something similar could happen again if properly timed and advance spade work is done by the Vietnamese. It would rest upon the NLF members' belief in the credibility of the proposal by the GVN.

This belief in turn formed the basis for the following synthesized profile of how the NLF could be brought into the Vietnamese government. The majority of the Vietnamese believe that, if the NLF came into the legislative branch through the democratic process such as special elections, only those members who do have a political base among the population would win. They believe that a number of NLF people would win an honest and supervised election. They do not fear anyone who could win an election because of their belief that only nationalists would be recognized by the

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village intellectual and teacher groups at the voting level. These people in turn determine who would win the election. Most of the Vietnamese believe that the coming election in two years for one-half of the Senators would be an opportune time to open the gate to the NLF. When pressed, however, most of them realized that two years is probably too long a time-frame and would be willing to enlarge the Lower and Upper House by holding a special election earlier.

The description given me of some members of the liberation front at the province and district level (two in COSVN as well) was impressive. The Vietnamese reminded me that they as a community know intimately most all of the political figures that oppose the GVN. One businessman even corrected me when I stated that Huynh Tan Phat was from Mytho. He remarked that Phat was a former close personal friend from the same village. This village is in Kien Hoa not Mytho. The majority of these Vietnamese also believe that the NLF from the village level down, if given the opportunity, would work for the GVN in their present capacity as village and hamlet leaders. This is to say that if there were elections in some Viet Cong hamlets today, the majority of these Vietnamese could accept the present NLF village chief as the "peoples' choice" if that village also had other government representation such as PF and constabulary forces. I was also reminded that this view is a personal one and not their "public" view. Vietnamese must have a hard line in Paris over a long period of time in order to effect such a solution as a "deadlock-breaker."

Conversely, not one Vietnamese could accept a coalition government. Such a settlement means that Hanoi selects the individuals. Such a communist team in the executive, looms unbeatable to most experienced non-communist politicians. A lack of unity among the GVN parties, with a forecast of much the same makes coalition equal to defeat.

C. Vietnamese Views Towards 1969 Pacification Program

After years of cautioning the Vietnamese pacification planners about the dangers to pacification of over-extension of resources, many medium-level and low-level executors of the program are confused by information they have received concerning the 1969 program.

The 1969 program is based upon rapid expansion of control over population centers through maximum use of the RF/PF forces. Their fear is that the Viet Cong will not react now to this expansion but will fall back and thus invite a further expansion because of the optimistic climate. They reason that at the opportune political time the Viet Cong will counter

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attack with the main force units that are presently dormant and in a matter of a few weeks smash some hamlets in each district so as to cause a loss of confidence throughout the district. This loss of hamlets would have a great potential effect upon Paris negotiations. They remind us that the Viet Cong have never reacted for pure military reasons. Since the most important political program they must support at the moment is Paris, they reason that their future military power will be used to support their side at the conference.

Additional criticisms of the 1969 program comes from the district level Vietnamese and to some extent the American advisory team. This concerns power-sharing with the village council and village chief. Many district chiefs reason that, because these councils and chairman have been in exile for many years, are poorly trained and motivated and are not the best-quality individuals, they will be unable to handle the security requirements (command the PF Platoon, guide the RD CADRE) or effectively compete with their Viet Cong counterparts. Most of these young Vietnamese officers have grown up during a time when the village chief and council were declining in power and quality because of a determined effort on the part of the government to centralize power. As a result, most of these young officers are not psychologically able to accept power on such sudden notice. This has had an effect on their advisors' views on the subject. It is essential that if the pacification program is to proceed without over-extension or regression, the village organization must be brought back into the power apparatus. On a selective basis of giving the most able chiefs and councils control of their own villages, success depends on overcoming this resistance. It will be necessary for the central government to use maximum persuasion and educational efforts on the district and provincial level officials.

An additional point raised by many Vietnamese, was an objection to cutting the size of the 50-man RD team, a time when the plans call for attacking hamlets in the D-C-V category. Most Vietnamese who have seen these teams operate during the past five years say the teams will be tied to the apron strings of the PF unit for their own survival. They further explained that this will cause the PF leadership to dominate the CADRE team, producing a larger territorial security force, at the expense of a civil capability.

D. Typical Vietnamese Plan for American Forces Withdrawal

The average Vietnamese sector and sub-sector military personnel believe that, with the exception of the three divisions in 3rd Corp, the Vietnamese Armed Forces will slowly improve.

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They believe that the American forces should eventually be used only for "Fire Brigades" to assist ARVN whenever necessary. By teaming up US fire support in the form of increased artillery they feel the Vietnamese forces can do the job presently being done by American forces. The American troops could be withdrawn to a series of single divisional bases which would incorporate all elements of the U.S. division. In this way each division would have only one main area to defend while awaiting a crisis for which they would have to play fireman. In this way, they reason, "The Vietnamese army would take over the duties now performed by the U.S. and as a result U.S. casualties would go down". This would have a beneficial effect upon the American public. Operating single bases eventually would show that there was a surplus of U.S. troops in Viet-Nam and substantial withdrawal could be made when this theory has proved itself.

Editors note: I must state here that the enclave theory for American troops to remain at some nominal level is very very popular with Vietnamese in all walks of life. There are many Vietnamese who have a deep-seated fear that because of their total commitment to the GVN and against the Viet Cong, any power-sharing with the MLF might put them personally in the position of being targets for assassination by the Viet Cong. The thought of "enclave" safe areas controlled by American troops is comforting for these individuals who have neither the resources nor the desire to pull out of Viet-Nam after a political settlement. The average number of troops to remain over the span of a decade is generally expected to be 100,000 to 150,000.

E. The JUST Cause

More and more in discussions with Vietnamese political leaders who are sensitive to the young people I heard about "The JUST Cause." The majority of the infrastructure of the GVN are not nationalistic in the sense that they respect and support their "government" (Chinh Phu). They are, however, extremely proud of their nation and of being Vietnamese (Quoc Gia). It therefore follows that the people who are willing to die in the service of the GVN are not doing so because of their respect for their government nor the image of that government. They are doing this because they think they are fighting for "The JUST Cause."

As a result of the differences expressed by the American government and the Vietnamese leadership over Paris; of clever Viet Cong propaganda; of a lack of communication by the government to its own infrastructure; a sizeable portion of the young people who are part of the GVN are having a problem determining where "The JUST Cause" really lies.

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Many Vietnamese say that Thieu made his worst tactical error since becoming President over the "enlarged talks". He should have known that in the end he would have to go to Paris under U.S. terms. For a few days of glory in resisting the U.S. he finally had to admit to the young people in Viet-Nam that the U.S. government can control his actions and that he is to some degree a puppet of the U.S. This disturbing psychological problem will have little effect now, according to my Vietnamese friends. It will have a great deal of effect after a cease-fire. The Viet Cong will continue to insist that the Thieu government is and has always been a puppet government and in spite of the elections deserves no place in the post-war political life of Viet-Nam. Many young people, because of their growing resentment of the U.S., will use the rejection of the Thieu government as a cathartic for that resentment.

To check this out I spent one day at Vung Tau with Colonel Be and a number of his political instructors. Most of them agreed that this was now happening. I asked them to tell me what are the three most emotional questions currently asked by their 55,000 students. The answers:

1. Why really did the Americans come to Viet-Nam?
2. Will we have to repay anything for their sacrifices here?
3. President Thieu must do what President Johnson wants him to do (Paris situation). Is Colonel Be also under the control of the advisors? Are the province chiefs under the control of American advisors? Do the district chiefs have to do what the Americans tell them to do?

One of the shortcomings of the GVN program is the lack of a strong, active, and wide gauge political indoctrination program for their own infrastructure. My personal observation is that the rural population is no longer viable. Carrying on a communications program directly to these people may be an interesting academic exercise but I doubt its ability to create activists. The most important target groups are the leadership elements at all levels of GVN. This would include hamlet chiefs and councils, village chiefs and councils, rural school teachers, squad and platoon-level military leaders, technical service chiefs, other VIP leaders as determined.

Unless we convince the "convincers" we can expect little improvement in the general performance of most GVN commands.

EBumgardner;lsr

1/7/69

F. Green

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Everett Bumgardner (U.S.I.A.) on
"Current Political Observations on the Vietnamese Body Politic"
(Memorandum of January 6, 1969)

A. Vietnamese Understanding on U. S. Problems

In a marked change, more Vietnamese consider some U. S. troop reductions as inevitable and acceptable. But if panic is to be avoided reductions must be based on joint consultation and joint prior announcement and must be extended over a long time frame.

B. NLF Role

Some nationalist elements in NLF would be elected to seats in legislative branch in an honest and supervised election. Some might break away from domination of communist cadre. No Vietnamese could accept a coalition government.

C. 1969 Pacification Program

Considerable concern exists about dangers of over-extension in current accelerated pacification program. It is feared that VC, who are now dormant, will at politically opportune time and with eye toward Paris, launch massive and demoralizing counter attacks on selected hamlets in each district.

D. Views on U. S. Force Structure

The South Vietnamese feel that as their own forces gradually improve, U. S. forces operating from divisional bases should eventually be used only as fire brigades to provide assistance when necessary. The safe areas protected by U. S. forces would offer hope for those whose anti-Viet Cong position makes them assassination targets. 100,000 to 150,000 U. S. troops are generally expected to remain.

E. The Just Cause

Many South Vietnamese in Government service feel gap between their Government and a nationalist Just Cause. Thieu's image, strengthened by his resistance to U. S. on issue of enlarged talks, was weakened by eventual insistence of U. S. and resulting image of Thieu and GVN as puppet. This will have considerable effect in a post hostilities situation.

SFK

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